

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 BEIRUT 01526 051649Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----051702Z 069631 /47

O R 051615Z APR 77
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3555
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

S E C R E T BEIRUT 1526

EXDIS

DEPT PLEASE PASS USCINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652 GDS
TAGS: PFOR, LE, IS, SY
SUBJECT: SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON

REF: BEIRUT 1504

1. CALLED ON FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS THIS MORNING,
APRIL 5, FOR TOUR D'HORIZON. HE STARTED OFF BY ASKING ME
WHAT WAS SITUATION IN SOUTH. I SAID I HAD
HOPED TO HAVE HIM TELL ME, AND THEN PROCEEDED TO GIVE
HIM SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS IN OUR 1504. BOUTROS WAS SILENT
FOR A MOMENT AND THEN ASKED ME WHETHER SITUATION WAS
SERIOUS OR ALARMING. I ANSWERED THAT I THOUGHT IT WAS
SERIOUS BUT NOT YET ALARMING. HE AGREED AND THEN
ADDED THAT HE NEVERTHELESS FOUND WHAT WAS HAPPENING
VERY DISQUIETING.

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2. BOUTROS SAID THERE HAD BEEN EVIDENT SHIFT IN
SYRIAN POSITION REVEALED IN THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARDS
IMPLEMENTATION OF CAIRO ACCORDS AND THEIR
POSTURE VIS-A-VIS PALESTINIANS. TWO WEEKS AGO SYRIANS
HAD BEEN AMONG THOSE ADVOCATING STRICT INTERPRETATION
OF CAIRO ACCORDS, REGARDING BOTH ENTERING CAMPS AND

DISARMING PALESTINIANS. NOW, AS INDICATED BY ARTICLE IN YESTERDAY'S AL-BAATH, THEY HAD SWITCHED TO POSITION THAT IMPLEMENTATION OF CAIRO ACCORDS SHOULD WAIT RECONSTITUTION OF LEBANESE ARMY, WHICH WAS GOING TO BE MATTER OF MONTHS. LEBANESE HAD IMPRESSION THIS SWITCH BROUGHT ABOUT BY PRESSURE FROM KUWAITIS AND SAUDIS, AND POSSIBLY EGYPTIANS.

3. SECOND MANIFESTATION OF SYRIAN CHANGE OF POSITION WAS FACT THAT NOW THEY WERE SUPPORTING PALESTINIANS AGAINST LEBANESE CHRISTIAN FORCES IN SOUTH. HE NOTED THAT HE HAD SIGNALLED THIS DANGER TO US IN A CONVERSATION WITH ME ALMOST A MONTH AGO (BEIRUT 1102, NOTAL). WHAT HE FEARED THEN HAD COME TO PASS. SYRIANS COULD NOT AFFORD TO STAND BY IN FACE CONTINUED COOPERATION BETWEEN LEBANESE CHRISTIAN FORCES AND ISRAELIS AGAINST PALESTINIANS. TO DO SO WOULD OPEN THEM TO CRITICISM THEY THEMSELVES COOPERATING WITH ISRAELIS. HE THOUGHT RISK OF SYRIAN-ISRAELI MILITARY CLASH NOW APPRECIABLY INCREASED.

4. BOUTROS THEN ASKED WHAT LEBANESE COULD DO ABOUT SITUATION. I SAID I FRANKLY DID NOT KNOW.

5. COMMENT: AS USUAL, BOUTROS SEEMED TO KNOW VERY LITTLE ABOUT DETAILS OF SITUATION ON THE GROUND. HE WAS VERY SURPRISED TO LEARN THAT WE UNDERSTOOD TAIBEH WAS BACK IN HANDS OF LEBANESE FORCES. HE CALLED
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BRIGADIER KANAAN AT LEBANESE ARMY HEADQUARTERS AND GOT CONFIRMATION OF THIS. KANAAN ALSO CONFIRMED STORIES OF LANDING OF AIN JALOUT BRIGADE WERE UNTRUE.

6. BOUTROS'S CONCERN ABOUT SYRIAN INTENTIONS IS NEVERTHELESS FOUNDED ON RATIONAL ANALYSIS OF WHAT IS OCCURRING. SAME CONCERN SHARED BY SHIA DEPUTY FROM SOUTH, ABDUL LATIF ZEIN, WITH WHOM I HAD LUNCH AFTER SEEING BOUTROS. ZEIN SAID IT IMPOSSIBLE TO TELL WHO WAS ON FIRST. ISRAELIS, WHO HAD SUPPORTED INITIAL LEBANESE FORCES' OCCUPATION OF TAIBEH WITH HELICOPTERS AND TROOPS, HAD STOOD BY ON SUNDAY AND ALLOWED PALESTINIANS TO REOCCUPY TOWN. SYRIANS IN FORM OF SAIQA, AS WELL AS FATAH, HAD COOPERATED WITH REJECTIONISTS IN LATTER OPERATION. HE HAD JUST BEEN TOLD SYRIANS WERE ALSO IN MARJAYUN IN FORM OF SAIQA. (PERHAPS THE "PALESTINIAN ELEMENTS" REFERRED TO IN PARA 3 OF OUR 1514.) ISRAELIS HAD MADE FUSS TO PREVENT 500 SYRIAN REGULAR FORCES FROM

ENTERING NABATIYYA AND NOW HAD UPWARDS OF 2500
SYRIAN FORCES UNDER ANOTHER NAME EVEN CLOSER TO
THEIR BORDER. THEY MUST HAVE SOME GAME GOING,
BUT HE COULD NOT FIGURE OUT WHAT IT WAS.
PARKER

NOTE BY OC/T: BEIRUT 1526 NOT PASSED ABOVE ADDRESSEE.

SECRET

NNN

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